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ABSTRACT

Adult and continuing education is the most evolutionary area in education today. It is growing, both in terms of student participation and in the number and types of providers. Of the approximately 120 million adults in the United States, 12 percent (or 18 million) were involved in a formal learning experience leading to a diploma last year. Adult education is being provided by business and industry internal employee training and staff development activities, in labor unions, in professional organizations, and in community organizations. In addition, adult education is being provided by adult basic education programs (approximately two million adults served last year); and by higher education, which is making education increasingly available to adults over 25 through more flexible programs and more innovative offerings. Six major research issues can be identified as facing the adult and continuing education profession today: (1) How do we maintain research quality and relevance? (2) Who will provide funding for future research? (3) How do we keep abreast of research needs in light of continued educational, economic, social, and political change? (4) How do we establish viable research linkages within our profession, with our research colleagues in other fields, and with researchers in other parts of the world? (5) What will be the impact of future technologies on lifelong learners of tomorrow? and (6) Should continuing education be elective on the part of the individual or should it be controlled by extrinsic forces? These questions are important to the research efforts of lifelong learning researchers. (KC)

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Adult and Continuing Education Research Issues

Opening Keynote Address for the 1982 Lifelong Learning Research Conference

by Wendell Smith, Ph.D.

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I. Opening Remarks

It is indeed a pleasure for me to represent AEA/USA at the Fourth Annual Lifelong Learning Research Conference. I have had the opportunity to attend your past two conferences and have found them to represent a showcase of the best ongoing research in our profession. More importantly, this conference serves to stimulate quality standards and goals for future research efforts in the lifelong learning field.

II. Adult and Continuing Education--An Evolutionary Profession

Adult and continuing education is the most evolutionary area in education today. We are growing, both in terms of student participation and in the number and types of providers. This growth is at an alarming rate--a rate never anticipated by most of our researchers in the last decade.

There are approximately 120 million adults in our population, and according to the National Center for Education Stastics, 12 percent (or 18 million) were involved in a formal learning experience leading to a diploma last year. Many view the National Center for Education Statistics data as conservative and reference even higher participation rates such as those which were reported this fall by Carol Aslanian at the national adult education conference in Anaheim, California. Aslanian referenced a study conducted by the College Board this past year which reflected that 60 million adults, (or approximately one-half of the population over 25 years of age), had learned one or more topics

in the past year.

Who are the new providers meeting the educational needs of this expanding population of adult learners? The make-up of providers has changed even more dramatically than the increasing number of participants. A cross section of providers in three of the largest areas in adult and continuing education reflects the following:

A. Human Resource Development

Business and industry are increasing their internal employee training and staff development activities. A national study in 1977 conducted by the Conference Board, an industrial research board, reflected that 75 percent of all companies provided courses for their employees. The number of companies offering "in-house" training is even greater today. The Fall 1981 Continuing Education supplement of The New York Times referenced companies such as McDonald's offering its own curriculum of 18 courses to 614,000 franchisers and company managers.

It was reported that McDonald's students from 29 countries do not learn how to fry hamburgers--they learn human relations skills, and according to one student "... how to handle situations such as when you're taking it easy around 3:00 p.m. and a big bus pulls into the parking lot."

Some statistics from the Human Resource Development sector of our profession report that:

1. In Industry:
    a. $30 billion was spent last year by industry and government for basic research.
    b. 5.8 million students were enrolled in industry-sponsored degree programs last year.
    c. $60 billion is spent annually by business and industry for training alone.

2. In Labor Unions

500,000 persons annually participate in labor union apprenticeship programs.

3. In Professional Organizations

The American Banking Association, just one of thousands of professional associations in this country, served 230,000 bank employees with adult education programs last year.

4. In Community Organizations

Over 200,000 adults learned cardiopulmonary recessitation and other life-saving skills last year from the American Red Cross.

B. Adult Basic Education

Our challenge in the area of adult basic education continues. More than 50 million adults in our population today are lacking basic skills. According to Bob Worthington, Assistant Secretary in charge of federal adult basic education for the U.S. Department of Education, approximately two million adult basic education students were served last year. Although the $100 million level of federal support to adult basic education is assured for another year, there is much to be done as we launch into serving yet another adult basic education audience--the Cuban refugees.

Because so many of our educational providers have income generation as a goal, we have witnessed a very limited interest in new providers supplying adult basic education opportunities.

C. Higher Education

The U.S. Census Bureau reports that one in three college students is now over 25 years old; it is projected that if the rate of adult student attendance at colleges and universities remains unchanged, much of the effect of the next decade's decline in the 18-24 year-old population will be offset.

I find it interesting to observe the renewed interest in adult and continuing education by our "ivory tower" colleagues. Last year Harvard University, for

example, enrolled 16,000 candidates in their "regular" degree programs and over 45,000 in continuing education.

Last month the Chronicle of Higher Education published an article which announced that Yale University was establishing a non-traditional "without walls" program in an effort to serve ongoing demands. The article further stated that the Yale program will initially serve a student body of seven students. Some additional higher education statistics indicate that:

1. By 1985, one-third of the adults in the United States will have a college degree.
2. 50 percent of all high school graduates go on to college (75 percent public and 25 percent private)
   a. 50 percent graduate in four years.
   b. 70 percent eventually graduate.
3. The annual budget of colleges and universities in the United States is $60 billion.

There are many other facets of adult and continuing education which are experiencing dramatic changes. In an effort to more thoroughly reflect the research implications represented by our changing profession, I polled each of the twenty-five chairpersons of the commissions and sections represented in AEA/USA. As an umbrella association which encompasses the entire adult and continuing education profession, I believe that our professional association is in a postion to serve as a catalyst between those scholars who have research expertise, equipment and interests, and our practitioners who are primarily engaged in teaching and administering program activities.

I would now like to list the major research issues which appear to be generic or reflective of common concerns which transverse the ideological units represented in adult and continuing education. In developing this list, not only did I analyze the issues which were identified by AEA/USA committee chairpersons, but I reviewed the issues which have been identified at previous Lifelong

Learning Research Conferences by Donnie Dutton, J. Roby Kidd, Violet Malone and Bill Metcalfe.

III. Generic Research Issues In Adult and Continuing Education

1. How do we maintain research quality and relevance?

We need to deal as much as possible with "hard data" and stop generalizing with the implications of our findings. We need to quit talking so much to ourselves in our own jargon and become more cognizant of, and involved with, the primary users of our findings--the teacher practitioners, administrators and policy makers.

2. Who will provide funding for future research?

Sources of governmental support are obviously declining at the local, state and federal levels. On the federal scene, we are witnessing a major change in grant administrative procedures. We no longer have "revenue sharing." "Categorical grants" are now moving into a "block grant" concept which places funding priorities the state and local levels. This year within the Department of Education, 43 categorical programs involving $470 million will be moved into "block grant" administration.

It is also clear that the government will assume less fiscal responsibility for funding programs. This means that our other primary sources for grant support, such as philanthropic and corporate foundations will be inundated with proposal requests. In my opinion, corporate foundations, particularly those in your own areas, hold the most promise for grant support. An often overlooked source of support is local industry. I urge each of you to get better acquainted with local training and staff development directors. Lastly, federal governmental agencies, (with the exception of the Armed Services), who historically had funding available to maintain their own research and instructional staffs, will be looking for more economical ways to sustain training and research activities such as contracting with ourside providers.

One thing does appear clear as we think of fundable projects--this is that tangible cost effective results will become increasingly important in the future.

3. How do we keep abreast of research needs in light of continued educational, economic, social, and political change?

Adult and continuing educators have never been labeled as traditionalists; we have been the innovators, the change agents, the persons on the cutting edge of new program developments.

I believe the future rate of change within our society will be unparalleled. Research which we conduct today will likely be obsolete tomorrow unless we build into the research design some variables involving projected future technologies and projected societal change.

4. How do we establish viable research linkages within our profession, with our research colleagues in other fields, and with researchers in other parts of the world?

I am convinced that professional associations hold the greatest potential to allow us to gain initial acquaintance with our colleagues. AEA/USA has served as an umbrella association for adult and continuing education and the new American Association for Adult and Continuing Education (AAACE) will provide even greater linkages for its members. Local, state and regional adult education associations will provide you with key area contacts. If your interests are international in scope, you may even want to consider becoming involved in the International Council for Adult Education. ICAE will be meeting in Paris, France October 25-31, 1982. As the AEA representative to the ICAE Board, I am sure Dr. Huey Long, your closing keynoter, would

be happy to provide you with specifics concerning ICAE.

5. What will be the impact of future technologies (electronic media, computers etc.) on lifelong learners of tomorrow?

This is a futurist issue which I believe has a great deal of relevance for your research. As I look into my crystal ball, I can see unparalleled potential for worldwide satellite broadcasting and computer-assisted learning. It appears to me that the hardware technologies have already surpassed the development of software. The corporate community is moving much more rapidly than the educational community in utilizing many of the technological capabilities currently available. Research involving new technologies can be expensive; however, I would wager that you would be surprised to see the support many of the hardware manufacturers would be willing to provide to software development and equipment utilization research.

6. Should continuing education be elective on the part of the individual or should it be controlled by extrinsic forces such as the government, professional societies, employers and others?

This issue has recently come to the forefront for two major reasons:

1. Societal concerns of malpractice within the medical professions.
2. "Turf-vision" among providers stemming from profit aspects of continuing education.

AEA has taken a stand that continuing education should be elective. Most of our research has centered around teaching techniques involving the self-motivated adult learners.

Each year The Chronicle of Higher Education publishes a profile (by states) of legislated manditory continuing education for professional re-licensure. In the last study, California and Kansas had the largest number of professions requiring continuing education, with 53 each. On the other end of the continuum, my state, Missouri, had only one.

The trend of manditory continuing education in the professions has subsided,

primarily due to instances of misuse, such as situations where Continuing Education Units (CEU's) are awarded for activities such as a cruise in the Bahamas where a two-hour course is instructed over cocktails aboard ship (a tax-deductible activity). I think it is clear that some adult learning will always be motivated by extrinsic forces. Aslanian, in the study I mentioned earlier, found that 83 percent of adult learners were motivated by change in their lives such as the necessity to operate new machines their company had acquired. Only 17 percent of those surveyed in Aslanian's study represented Houle's "socializers and lovers of learning."

A considerable amount of our past research has dealt with self-motivated learners; we should direct more of our studies to ways of working with the larger population and analyzing their true motivations.

IV. Closing Remarks

Again, I appreciate the opportunity to participate in your conference. As our researchers, you represent a paramount role in the future of the lifelong learning profession; it is you who analyze our previous efforts, correlate and compare our activities with happenings in other professions both at home and abroad, and make the projections and recommendations for our future growth and development so that we can most effectively serve the lifelong learning society of tomorrow.

You have a busy and exciting two days ahead of you. Happy conferencing!